

Hands-on environmental stewardship deepens Erica Garcia, civil engineer, experience

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Erica Garcia gets back to her roots at the Lab

Erica Garcia, an undergraduate student, draws from her past while working on water quality with the LANL Environmental Protection group. She currently assists with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) outfall sampling, which is regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Erica measures the chlorine and pH level in water around the Laboratory.

The Lab must meet all environmental regulations set forth by stakeholders such as the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) and the Department of Energy (DOE). Water sampling is constantly utilized in order to comply with water quality permits and regulations. Erica enjoys working in the field, expressing, "The best part of the Lab is getting to work in the field and being interactive in my own degree."

Her team also conducts engineering design reviews for the storm water team. In the event of a storm, the designs ensure the locations around the Laboratory are compliant with permits involving storm water runoffs. She states, “I am able to broaden my horizons and work with the entire group instead of a specific task.”

Students choose from a variety of appointments at the Lab, from full-time to casual. Erica is on casual status, meaning she works as a student during her summer and winter breaks from the university. She attends New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, studying civil engineering with a minor in agricultural engineering and math.

Born and raised in Santa Fe, NM, the agricultural field has always fascinated Erica. She used to raise and show pigs. “Since I was eight years old, I have been interested in agriculture. I was in 4-H in Santa Fe County and participated in the shows. That’s where I got my roots.” 4-H is a national organization preparing youth to become better leaders in their own community.

Today Erica enjoys staying active with her agricultural roots and helping out with the 4-H programs. She says, “I want the kids in my community to have the same experience I had as a kid.”

Erica’s career goals are to work in the fields of irrigation and water design, further explaining, “I always wanted to work with water and the Lab has helped me stick to my interest.” She also recommends the Lab to students in *any* field, because “The Lab is a great opportunity. You can explore any kind of field, and all fields are welcomed and encouraged.”

With the Lab’s broad and diverse set of scientific capabilities, students are given the opportunity to choose the right path for their careers. The student programs specifically complement each student’s education with work experience related to their chosen field of study.

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